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French to Investigate Sinking of Protest Ship

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PARIS, Aug. 8 — The French Government began an official inquiry today into the sinking in New Zealand last month of a ecologists' protest ship.

The decision became known after reports here that French agents may have been involved in the incident, in which one man died.

Prime Minister Laurent Fabius, in a letter made public here this morning, said that the investigation would establish whether "French agents, services, or authorities may have been informed of the preparation of a criminal attack or even have participated in it."

A former Secretary General in the Cabinet of Charles de Gaulle, Bernard Tricot, was named to lead the investigation.

The ship, the Rainbow Warrior, belonged to the antinuclear environmentalist group Greenpeace. It was to have led a "peace flotilla" to the South Pacific atoll of Mururoa, where France conducts nuclear weapons tests.

A Portuguese photographer was killed when he went aboard the ship after an explosion ripped through the vessel in Auckland harbor on July 10. He died when a second blast sank the vessel at dockside. The explosive de-

vices had apparently been attached to the ship's hull.

After the attack, the New Zealand police arrested a French-speaking couple carrying what were apparently false Swiss passports and charged them with murder and arson. The police are also reported to be searching for three French citizens who are believed to have been accomplices in the attack.

The sabotage team was believed to have gone to New Zealand aboard a ship, the Ouvea, that had been chartered in the French Pacific island territory of New Caledonia. However, the ship and its crew have disappeared after last being seen on July 17 at the Australian island of Norfolk.

The Government's decision to investigate the bombing followed by only hours various unconfirmed reports appearing in the press here that the sabotage team may have had ties to the French intelligence service. It was unclear here whether the investigation had been provoked by the press reports, which were published without identifying sources of information, or whether the Government had reasons of its own to suspect the involvement of French officials.

A spokesman for Mr. Fabius said that the investigation would look into

various "rumors" of official French involvement, but that there was no hard information indicating that past or present officials of the intelligence service had taken part in the incident.

In his letter, replying to a formal request from the President that a "rigorous investigation" be undertaken, Mr. Fabius said: "A link between the two people indicted by the New Zealand authorities in the matter of the Rainbow Warrior and French services has been suggested. I think it is necessary to ask an individual of unquestionable reputation to look into all the elements of the affair."